

# **Re-configuring Web Imaginaries: Reflections on community-based web archiving for social justice**

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The Web is ephemeral, performative and perpetually made and remade through the everyday activities of heterogeneous actors. The instability and precariousness of web-based content has galvanised a field of practice around the curation of web archives - or 'archived' collections of historical snapshots of the Web. Drawing on online/offline ethnographic research in web archiving communities, this paper explores how web archiving is serving the aims of an array of social/data justice advocates and activist archivists amidst a global climate of government surveillance, concerns over the trustworthiness of online information sources and commercial/platform control of user-contributed content. Here web archives are reflected on as 'places' where the past, present and future of the Web collapses around an evolving assemblage of sociotechnical practices and actors dedicated to enabling different, (and at times, conflicting) community-defined web imaginaries. Based on a combination of observations, interviews and documentary sources, this paper argues that the web archival activities of organisations, people and bots are both historically-situated and embedded in the contemporary politics of online communication and information sharing; and reveals web archives to be contested sites where these politics are enabled, enacted and re-enacted over time. The paper contributes to wider discussions around the performance of power and politics on the Web, and raises new questions regarding the ways in which communities negotiate challenges concerning centralisation, technological development and sustainability, 'free'/volunteer labour, self-governance and distributed collection and storage of web archives.

## **KEYWORDS**

web archives, social justice, digital sociology